



Anxiety and phobias in dogs

Anxiety can cause problems

Just like people, dogs can suffer anxiety – fear of a possible threat or danger.

Anxiety in certain situations is normal and even useful as it can help the dog react quickly to a threat. However, too much anxiety, or being anxious about the wrong things can have bad consequences. An anxious or fearful dog is more likely to bite.

Signs of anxiety are subtle and often missed by people. You might hear people say, “He didn’t give a warning before he bit me.”

Signs a dog might be feeling anxious include:

- licking lips
- looking away
- panting
- moving slowly or away from you
- ears to the side
- refusing to eat
- moving around continuously
- being ‘on guard’
- barking continuously
- aggression or biting
- destroying furniture
- urinating in the wrong place.

If this sounds like your dog, it needs to be assessed and helped individually. You should talk to your vet about what to do. The earlier you get help, the better for your pet.

Pets can develop phobias

A phobia is an excessive, uncontrollable fear reaction. Your pet has no control over what it does and many people will refer to it as a “panic attack” or that the animal has “lost it”.

The tendency to develop phobias is often inherited and will probably develop no matter how we handle the pet. Anxiety and fears may develop into phobias if the pet is repeatedly exposed to very intense or fearful events.

The best time to deal with fearful or anxious behaviour in your pet is as soon as it starts. By managing the environment, using behaviour modification and appropriate medication, we can often prevent the pet’s fear from developing into a severe phobia.

Your vet will be able to design a treatment program especially for your pet. If this sounds like your dog, it needs to be assessed and helped individually. You should talk to your vet about what to do. The earlier you get help, the better for your pet.



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